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House Passes Bipartisan Budget Deal

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The House on Thursday evening passed a two-year budget agreement that requires new federal workers and military retirees to contribute \$12 billion in a bipartisan deal to partially repeal some spending cuts under the sequester.

The \$85 billion savings package announced by Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., and Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., on Tuesday would fund the government past Jan. 15, 2014, averting another shutdown and setting spending levels through fiscal 2015. As part of the deal, federal employees hired on or after Jan. 1, 2014, with less than five years of service would have to pay 4.4 percent toward their pensions -- 1.3 percent more than employees hired after 2012 contribute to their defined retirement benefit, and 3.6 percent more than most workers hired before 2012 contribute.

In addition, working-age military retirees younger than 62 would receive less generous pensions under the legislation. They would see a decrease, phased in over the next two years, to the calculation of their cost-of-living adjustment, equal to inflation minus 1 percent. The change would not affect service members who retired because of injury or

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disability.

Military personnel who serve less than 20 years -- about 83 percent -- do not receive a retirement benefit. Those who do spend a career in the military can hit the 20-year mark relatively early, retire from service in their 40s or 50s, draw a pension and work elsewhere. About 17 percent serve 20 years or more in the military.

The budget deal requires new civilian federal workers and military retirees to contribute \$12 billion in savings overall -- \$6 billion from each group -- to help partially repeal the sequester for fiscal 2014 and fiscal 2015. That \$12 billion figure is part of a proposed \$63 billion in savings found in various programs to offset the cost of rolling back some of the automatic spending cuts for two years. Other savings in the package include higher airline fees for travelers, crackdowns on federal benefit waste and fraud, and increased premiums on companies that pay the federal government to guarantee their pension benefits.

Current federal employees managed to emerge unscathed in this latest round of budget proposals. Initial reports of the deal said current federal workers would have to contribute \$20 billion overall to the budget savings, prompting federal employee unions and other advocacy organizations, as well as the Washington-area congressional delegation, to push back hard against such a proposal.

"If Chairman Ryan and I did not reach an agreement, we would be at sequester level very shortly, and many of these same people [federal employees] would be facing furloughs, layoffs and uncertainty," Murray said on Tuesday. "We have brought certainty back to all those people."

Passed in House, NDAA now heads to Senate

Politico

December 12, 2013

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The House on Thursday approved a compromise version of this year's defense authorization bill, kicking it to the Senate under a fast-track process that precludes senators from tacking on controversial amendments dealing with Iran sanctions and other divisive issues.

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The chairmen of the two committees are urging reluctant senators to go along with the expedited plan. Otherwise, they warn, a number of must-pass authorities will expire at year's end, including special pays and bonuses for troops.

"I encourage all of our colleagues to vote for this bill to sustain the efforts of those who are willing to put themselves in harm's way to protect us," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon (R-Calif.) said on Thursday.

The bill's passage is important to McKeon's legacy as well as the legacy of his Senate counterpart, Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich). Levin has said he does not plan to run for reelection next year, and McKeon has said he is considering retiring at the end of this term.

A failure to get the defense measure across the finish line would represent a major blow to both of the long-serving advocates for the Pentagon.

"I'd like to go out with a bill," Levin told reporters on Thursday, referring to next year's defense authorization measure. "If this is the only way to get a bill done, OK."

"It's not my preference, believe me," added Levin. "I used to have much more hair, as you may remember."

Levin, McKeon, Inhofe and Smith spent the past few weeks hashing out the differences between the House and Senate versions of the defense policy legislation in anticipation of an end-of-the-year finish that wouldn't allow time for a formal House-Senate conference committee. The House passed its version of the defense bill in June, but the Senate bill stalled in a partisan spat over restrictions on the number of amendments.

On Monday, the committee leaders unveiled their compromise bill, which would authorize about \$527 billion in base defense spending for the current fiscal year -- in line with the Pentagon's request but well above the caps required under another round of sequestration or in the Budget Committee agreement making its way through Congress.

The elevated spending level allowed the Armed Services Committees to sidestep tough strategic choices about what to cut and what to keep

under another round of sequestration -- but also meant that the bill passed by the House on Thursday is out of sync with the fiscal realities facing the Pentagon.

Still, the bill advances several major policy fights.

It would retain a prohibition on transferring prisoners at the military prison at Guantanamo Bay to the United States. But it would ease restrictions on transferring Gitmo prisoners to other countries -- a provision some Democrats are hailing as a small step toward achieving the White House's goal of shuttering the facility.

The bill would also overhaul the way the military handles allegations of sexual assault, making it a crime to retaliate against those who report sex crimes in the ranks, among other new reforms.

But it leaves out a controversial amendment by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) to remove decisions to prosecute allegations of sexual assault from the military chain of command. The measure met fierce opposition from Pentagon leaders, who are committed to their longstanding command structure.

Thursday's House passage did not resolve Senate Republicans' amendment frustration. Senate Minority Whip John Cornyn said he's not sure whether the bill would muster the necessary 60 votes. "There's going to be some resistance," the Texas Republican told POLITICO, voicing frustration with the expedited process being used to move the bill that won't allow amendments in the Senate.

"There's no reason why this couldn't be done in January except for another power play by the majority leader," Cornyn said.

Meanwhile, Sen. Lindsey Graham said he'd support the bill only if he gets assurances there will be a vote later to impose stricter sanctions on Iran. "I will oppose it until we find a way forward on Iranian sanctions," the South Carolina Republican told POLITICO.

Despite the complaints, Inhofe said he anticipated that about half of the Republicans in the Senate would vote for the bill.

"Tuesday or Wednesday we'll have it in the Senate, and I think we have the votes," he said.

DOE Announces New Investment in Small-Scale Reactors

Clare Foran, National Journal
December 13, 2013

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The Energy Department is continuing to invest in the promise of small-scale nuclear reactors as part of the president's "all of the above" energy strategy.

The department announced Thursday an investment in a small modular-

reactor project currently under development by NuScale Power, headquartered in Portland, Ore.

DOE will help finance the project through a cost-share agreement spanning five years, during which time the department will match private investment in the project up to an a yet-to-be-determined total amount. The investment comes as part of DOE's Small Modular Reactor Licensing Technical Support program.

Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz touted the potential benefits of the technology in a statement Thursday.

"Small modular reactors represent a new generation of safe, reliable, low-carbon nuclear-energy technology and provide a strong opportunity for America to lead this emerging global industry," Moniz said. "The Energy Department is committed to strengthening nuclear energy's continuing important role in America's low-carbon future, and new technologies like small modular reactors will help ensure our continued leadership in the safe, secure, and efficient use of nuclear power worldwide."

Rare Manhattan Project Photos Show The Birth Of The Atomic Age

Attila Nagy, Gizmodo

December 13, 2013

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The Department Of Energy posted 21 photos onto its Flickr page a few weeks ago about Chicago Pile-1, the site of the first human-made, self-sustaining nuclear reaction, located in Chicago.

Built under the west stands of the Stagg football field of the University of Chicago and initiated on 2 December 1942, the Chicago Pile-1 was the world's first nuclear reactor. It consisted of a large, monolithic pile of uranium pellets and graphite blocks, with cadmium, indium, and silver control rods, but no radiation shield and cooling system. As the supervisor of the chain reaction, physicist Enrico Fermi described the CP-1 as "a crude pile of black bricks and wooden timbers." Over the years, a myth has persisted that "all the people at the first reactor died of cancer." Argonne National Laboratory tracked all those people who worked at the site, however, and, for those who passed away noted the cause of death. The myth was proved to be false.

This is how Argonne remembers the CP-1 criticality:

Work on the final experimental pile--the 31st--began on November 16, 1942. It was a prodigious effort. Physicists and staffers, working around the clock, built a lattice of 57 layers of uranium metal and uranium oxide embedded in graphite blocks. A wooden structure supported the graphite pile. Fermi was reading "Winnie the Pooh" to improve his English so the instruments were given names of characters in the Pooh stories--Tigger, Piglet, Kanga and Roo. A Fermi protégé, Leona Woods--the only woman on the project--took careful measurements as the pile grew. Fermi,

stripped to the waist, was black and glistening; Hilberry said he could have played Othello.

December 2, 1942, the day wartime gas rationing began, was bitterly cold. The pile was ready for testing. It contained 22,000 uranium slugs and had consumed 380 tons of graphite, 40 tons of uranium oxide, six tons of uranium metal. It cost an estimated \$2.7 million. The experiment began at 9:45 a.m. 49 people were in attendance: Fermi, Compton, Szilard, Zinn, Hilberry, Woods; the young carpenter who built the graphite blocks and cadmium rods; members of the laboratory's health and protection unit; students and other scientists. Just before noon, Fermi declared he was hungry and called time out for lunch. All minds were on the experiment, but no one discussed it. At 2 p.m., Fermi's team was back at the court.

The three-man "suicide squad"--part of the automatic safety control system--stood by to douse the reactor if anything went wrong. There was a main control. And there was ZIP, a weighted safety rod devised by Zinn; it would automatically trip if neutron intensity became too high. There was an emergency ZIP, tied to the balcony rail, which Zinn operated by hand. And there was SCRAM--the safety control rod ax-man. That was Hilberry. He stood ready, ax in hand, to cut the rope. "I felt silly as hell," he later recalled. "This was a lot of nonsense. We all knew the scientific work would be all right." At 3:53 p.m., a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction was achieved for the first time ever. It had taken 28 minutes.

DOE announces Record of Decision on Hanford Tank Closure and Waste Management

Dan Thesman, KVEW TV
December 12, 2013

[LINK](#)

Washington, D.C. - The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) expects the first in a series of Records of Decision (ROD) for Tank Closure and Waste Management at the Hanford Site to appear in the Federal Register on December 13, 2013. This ROD is being issued pursuant to the Final Tank Closure and Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement for the Hanford Site, Richland, Washington, prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The decision includes retrieval of 99 percent of the waste currently stored in Hanford's 177 underground storage tanks, landfill closure of the single-shell tank farm systems, and operation and maintenance of the tank farms. For the Fast Flux Test Facility, above-grade structures would be removed and below-grade structures would be entombed. To improve waste management at the site, existing facilities would be upgraded, low-level and mixed low-level radioactive waste from Hanford would be disposed of in an Integrated Disposal Facility, and an additional disposal facility for tank closure waste would be constructed, as needed. DOE will continue to defer the importation of offsite waste at Hanford, at least until the Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant is operational.

Additional information about the Final Tank Closure and Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement and ROD will be found [HERE](#). Information about the ongoing cleanup mission at Hanford can be found [HERE](#).

GAO: NNSA's modernization costs jump \$19B, but the budget numbers don't mesh with plans

Frank Munger's Atomic City Underground

December 11, 2013

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The Government Accountability Office released a report today showing that, based on a comparison of the National Nuclear Security Administration's budget materials in 2012 and now, the cost of modernizing the nuclear security enterprise -- FY2014 through FY31--jumped by about \$19 billion. Most of the increase occurred in the years beyond FY 2019, the report said.

The modernization effort is broken into three areas -- stockpile, infrastructure and science, technology & engineering -- and the GAO said the budget numbers don't tell the full story. "Budget estimates for two of three areas discussed in NNSA's modernization plans may not represent total funding needed and therefore do not fully align with aspects of these plans," the report states.

Indeed, the big-bucks Uranium Processing Facility, which has prompted much analysis and speculation about the eventual price tag, can't be blamed for the cost growth here because the NNSA hasn't included the numbers for the period that's being studied. Actually, it's the big growth in stockpile refurbishment and maintenance that accounts for the \$19 billion jump - and then some. The report said stockpile estimate is up by \$27 billion, meaning the other areas are actually lower.

The comparison of modernization of infrastructure actually drops from the budget estimates made in 2012 because the big-ticket items -- UPF and CMRR at Los Alamos -- aren't included there, according to the GAO report.

"Although NNSA's budget estimates through 2031 decline only slightly when compared with those in the 2012 budget materials, NNSA excluded most of the budget estimates for two major construction projects--the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) and Chemistry and the Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF)--from its 2014 budget materials," the report said.

"This led to a decrease in the total budget estimates for the infrastructure area of about \$4 billion for 2014 through 2031 when compared to NNSA's 2012 budget materials. However, NNSA plans to construct these facilities or alternatives to the facilities and, as a result, NNSA's budget estimates for the infrastructure area are not fully aligned with its modernization plans and likely underestimate the amount of funding that will be needed in future years.

"First, NNSA did not include in the 2014 budget materials any budget

estimates for the latter two phases of the ongoing project to construct UPF. NNSA included about \$5.4 billion in its budget estimates for the first of three phases of UPF. According to NNSA officials, they did not include budget estimates for the latter phases of the UPF project in the 2014 budget materials because planning for these phases of the project is still in the early stages. Additionally, NNSA did not include funding for CMRR-NF in the 2014 budget materials. NNSA has stated the need to construct these facilities--or alternatives to these facilities--to complete its mission. According to the 2014 budget materials and NNSA officials, NNSA did not include budget estimates for CMRR-NF or its alternative because they are currently evaluating potential options for CMRR-NF or an alternative, and the plans were not yet developed enough to include budget estimates in the 2014 budget materials."

GAO recommended that in the future NNSA include a range of budget estimates for preliminary projects or program in its future plans, and the report said the NNSA generally concurred.

Taking responsibility for security at NNSA/DOE

Frank Munger's Atomic City Underground

December 12, 2013

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Once he returned to the Department of Energy and even before tackling the job as acting administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, Bruce Held was asked to head an agency-wide review of security and help figure out why things weren't working like they should, especially the communications.

This was, of course, more fallout from the now-infamous security breach at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant on July 28, 2012, which unmasked flaws far more pervasive than an off-night for the security team in the Oak Ridge plant's Protected Area.

Held has now essentially completed that review, and he sent a letter last week to Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz to advise him that the team is proceeding with the details. In an interview this week, Held said the affected personnel were briefed on Monday and he indicated that a decision will be forthcoming on who will head security for the National Nuclear Security Administration.

There'll be another person in a mirror job heading security for the rest of the Department of Energy, the Energy and Science sides, he said.

Held said he was charged with following up the security review by Brigadier Gen. Sandra Finan, then the NNSA's principal assistant deputy administrator for military application, who found there were a lot of people who asserted authority but few people who accepted responsibility.

The answer to the conundrum was basically found in the NNSA Act and reading how the position of Chief of Defense Nuclear Security was defined by law, Held said. He said his team is closely adhering to the law, at least until such time the law is possibly modified.

"So, what we're going to do, just for practical reasons, we are going to move ahead on the NNSA side first, and then we'll do a parallel effort, which we've just started on the Energy and Science side. There will be a mirror image on the DOE side," he said.

Generally speaking, the jobs will be the chief security officer, and there'll be no doubt about the accountability or who's in charge.

"The issue was, how do you unify authority and accountability," Held said, "and how do you have an enterprise-wide approach to security? And everything else kind of flowed down.

"Initially what my thinking was . . . because of the law, you had to have an NNSA person and an Energy and Science person, because NNSA is kind of blocked off. But, if the law changed at some point, for whatever reason, then you would have a rationale for combining those into one chief security officer for the entire enterprise, and that still could be the way it goes."

However, Held said he finally concluded that it's best to keep things separate between the NNSA and the rest of the Department of Energy.

"I've kind of come to the idea that the security problems of Energy and Science are so significantly different from NNSA, that having two is probably the way to go -- even if you could (legally combine them). Because you'd get either too much security for Energy and Science or not enough for nuclear weapons. So, I'm actually kind of floating the idea that two is the way to do it."

On the NNSA side, the title by law is chief of defense nuclear security, but Held said there are still some issues in paralleling the titles for the two sides of the agency.

"By law, the CDNS is an appointee of the secretary, not of the administrator," he said. "The CDNS reports to the administrator, but has an independent line of communication to the secretary whenever he feels it is needed -- and that is by law."

While trying to make that situation parallel on the DOE side, the security position will be an appointee of the secretary but report to one of the undersecretaries -- either the undersecretary for energy and science or the undersecretary for management and performance, he said.

"We haven't quite worked that out," Held said.

Nuke industry to Obama: You need us

Laura Barron-Lopez, The Hill

December 12, 2013

[LINK](#)

The nuclear industry is blasting President Obama for his recent executive order requiring federal agencies get 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020.

The Nuclear Energy Institute called the Dec. 5 order a "missed" opportunity by the president to include nuclear power in a letter sent to the administration on Thursday.

The order will nearly triple the use of the federal government's renewable sources and apply to all federal agencies, civilian and military.

"As you and others in your administration have often said, nuclear energy can, and must, play a major role in any credible national plan to reduce carbon emissions and we believe it should be included in any presidential mandate to federal agencies on procurement of carbon-free electricity," Marvin S. Fertel, president of the Nuclear Energy Institute, wrote in the letter.

Nuclear plants make up 64 percent of carbon-free electricity produced in the U.S., Fertel explained, and "dwarf" the amount of emissions prevented by other energy sources.

"Given this record, we believe failure to include nuclear energy in your mandate for procurement of carbon-free electricity by federal facilities is a missed leadership opportunity, and one that would be embraced by consumers," Fertel added.